

### El calendari gastronòmic: culinary nationalism in Catalan festivals

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*El calendari gastronòmic*

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## Abstract

Expressions of Catalan identity have become increasingly significant following increased friction with the Spanish central government. Catalonia-specific foods and festivals are two such expressions that have been mobilised as national symbols, and which I will consider in this paper. I will discuss the role that food plays in festive occasions in the Catalan calendar, including secularised traditional holidays and Catholic feast days, newly created festivals and fairs centred on foods, and finally the three national days (23<sup>rd</sup> April, 24 June and 11<sup>th</sup> September). In doing so, I will also tease out other, related themes in Catalan cultural identity today, including the feelings of connectedness with a historic past, land and landscape, the championing of seasonality through culinary events, and Catalonia's gastronomic calendar. Creating, adapting and performing festivities that are celebrations of national and culinary symbols are a means of celebrating Catalan identity itself. They are events when Catalans meet to discuss and reformulate their identity, and sources of claims to distinctiveness.

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## *El calendari gastronòmic*

### Culinary nationalism in Catalan festivals

Venetia Johannes

#### Introduction

In my research, I study how food is used to express Catalan national identity in the context of the rise in support for secessionist politics in the Catalan Autonomous Community (Catalonia), Spain. Since 2010, there has been a visible strengthening of support for Catalonia's independence as a separate state. It is this development in Catalan identity politics that has catalysed (or perhaps better 'Catalanised') a re-evaluation of expressions of national and cultural symbols in Catalonia in all walks of life. The case of food and cuisine provides a particularly salient means of studying this process in Catalonia, since food is both an everyday reality, and intertwined with other markers of national identity. My focus is on 'gastronationalism', defined by Michaela DeSoucey (2010) as 'a form of claims-making and a project of collective identity', which presumes that 'attacks (symbolic or otherwise) against a nation's food practices are assaults on heritage and culture, not just on the food item itself' (DeSoucey 2010: 433). The data I present here were gathered during fifteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in Catalonia in 2012-2013, and several shorter visits since then. Most of the information presented here is derived from ethnographic observations in the field, or interviews with informants in either Barcelona or my main field site of Vic, a town 70 km north of Barcelona. This includes descriptions of foods associated with festivals and the ways in which these festivals are celebrated. While I describe these activities in the past, they continue to be practised as I saw them today.

The most recent round of confrontations between the Catalan government (*Generalitat*) and the Spanish state in September 2017 was the culmination of a simmering tension that began with protests in the region in 2010. These were the result of a judgement by the Spanish Constitutional Court on the 2006 Catalan Statute of Autonomy. The ruling decided that the most pro-Catalan clauses should be removed, particularly official recognition of Catalonia as a nation, leading to widespread protests and a lingering sense of injustice. Economic disagreements, such as the fiscal deficit between Catalonia and Spain (estimated at 8-10%), have also lent support to pro-independence sentiments. On 1<sup>st</sup> October 2017 the *Generalitat* carried out an independence referendum, illegal according to the Spanish Constitution. Though there

was only a 43% voter turnout, and the Spanish government and European Union both condemned it, 90% were in favour of independence (BBC News 2017), leading to a declaration of independence on 27<sup>th</sup> October. Since then, the referendum has triggered a political crisis in Spain, widely regarded as the greatest challenge the country has faced since the return of democracy. It has culminated in the removal of Catalonia's regional autonomy, the arrest of leading Catalan politicians and activists, and the flight of Catalan president Carles Puigdemont to Brussels followed by his arrest in Germany in March. Elections for a new government in December (narrowly won by pro-independentists) did not resolve the deadlock. This crisis has brought out bitter divisions at the heart of Catalan society between supporters of Catalan independence and those who wish Catalonia to remain a part of Spain. The general view is that the population is split roughly equally into each camp, although according to the most recent data 71% would be in favour of a referendum on independence (Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió 2017).

Against the backdrop of the political situation, it is essential to remember that Catalan identity is not just political, but also cultural. Food culture is one of many ways of experiencing, practising and sustaining national culture beyond the political sphere, and this article considers that aspect. I will discuss the renewed importance of the gastronomic calendar following the new directions in pro-Catalan identity. The gastronomic calendar is a popular concept in Catalonia that defines certain foods as associated with certain festive days and has been acknowledged in the Catalan gastronomic literature since the early twentieth century (Domènech 1930). Next I will introduce the three national holidays celebrated in the Catalan autonomous community. In an apparent contradiction of the gastronomic calendar, however, two of these national days do not have an associated dish. I will therefore discuss attempts to promote new foods for these days, and the mixed reactions these have received. This discussion will be followed by a description of the role of food, specifically sausages, in Catalonia's 'anti-festival', *Dia de la Hispanitat*, where these are used as symbols to assert Catalan identity in the face of that of Spain. I conclude with a discussion of the presence of gastronomic markets and fairs focused on seasonal foodstuffs, often associated with a specific area. Throughout, I will also consider the relevance of Eric Hobsbawm's (1983) theory of the 'invention of tradition' to the phenomena under discussion.

### The gastronomic calendar

Aside from the three national, Catalan-specific holidays, which I discuss below, other festivities were celebrated, which I observed, almost universally throughout Catalonia. However, these were placed in a different category to Catalan-specific holidays, as they are celebrated throughout the rest of Eu-

rope. These included the festivities connected to Easter (Ash Wednesday, Carnival, Lent, Good Friday and Easter weekend), All Saints Day (1<sup>st</sup> November), Christmas (Christmas Day, St Stephen's Day and Epiphany), and the Catholic feast days celebrated throughout the year.

What made festivities not unique to Catalonia different in the eyes of many Catalans is the way in which they were celebrated in Catalonia itself: through the consumption of particular Catalan foods associated with certain holidays. This means of associating food and time is called the gastronomic calendar (*el calendari gastronòmic*). In fieldwork, the way in which food and festivity were associated was often considered a unique or defining characteristic of Catalan culinary culture. As one informant remarked, 'in no other country do you have a cake or something else for each festival. It's something that we have clearly here'. While similar concepts do in fact exist in other countries (it is not entirely unique to Catalonia), it is important to underline how these gastronomic and culinary associations were particular to Catalonia.

Many of these have come about because of the combined influences of seasonal produce and the religious calendar. For instance, a key part of the celebration of Lent in Catalonia has been the consumption of cod dishes, so much so that the period from February to March was called the *temporada de bacalla* (cod season) in restaurants, markets, media outlets and even in everyday interactions. The origins of this association are found in the historical prohibition on meat at a time when the only fish available in rural areas was dried cod. Another popular food for Lent included *bunyols de Quaresme* (sugared donuts), an energy boost during fasting. In recent decades, Carnival has not been strongly associated with Catalonia, though the once excessive consumption of meat in the run-up to Lent appears in the associated food of 'fat Thursday', *coca de llardons*, a cake decorated with pig rinds. Egg-heavy dishes began to appear from March onwards to take advantage of the natural increase in egg-laying, such as the *crema catalana* (cream custard) on St Joseph's Day on 19<sup>th</sup> March, and the Easter *mona* (a bread decorated with eggs in former times, now made from chocolate). A popular summer festive dish, the *coca*, which I discuss in more detail in the next section, was originally topped with seasonal fruits and nuts such as cherries, strawberries, almonds and hazelnuts.

In the autumn, Catalonia was overtaken by the *temporada de bolets* (mushroom season), when mushrooms became an everyday topic of conversation (more so than the cod season) and weekends were set aside for mushroom hunting. Two emblematic foods for the feast of All Saints (1<sup>st</sup> November) were seasonal chestnuts and *Panellets*, small marzipan-like sweetmeats made from almond flour and sugar. Like the *bunyols de Quaresme*, their high calories provided essential energy as the weather cooled. Pig dishes were also strongly associated with the late autumn and early winter months,

as this was the season of the *matança del porc* (pig-killing) at a time when pigs could not be kept over the winter. Saint Martin's Day (11<sup>th</sup> November) was often the day for the *matança*, an association that has remained to this day. Finally, for Christmas, the universally recognized dish has been the *escudella i carn d'olla*, a rich, calorific hotpot stew made from pig products and winter vegetables, suited to large gatherings and colder weather; the Christmas leftovers were reused on Saint Stevens Day (26<sup>th</sup> December) as the fillings for *canelons*, stuffed pasta rolls, demonstrating a national ideal of thriftiness. Other festive foods were inspired less by seasonality, for instance, a cake in the shape of a ring for the feast of Saint Anthony the Abbot (17<sup>th</sup> January), or a cake with decoration imitating the mountain of Saint Mary of Monserrat on her saint's day (27<sup>th</sup> April).

Today, neither seasonality nor religious prohibitions are as influential on contemporary food habits as they were historically. Most of the above foods were consumed or observed in a secular context, even by anti-religious individuals, because of the 'customary' relationship between the day and the food. Many of the foods consumed today are more a form of reinterpreting past culinary practices. In the context of Hobsbawm (1983), it is hard to place these specifically as 'inventions of tradition'. One could argue that they are 'novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition' (Hobsbawm 1983: 2). Yet Hobsbawm also distinguishes this from 'custom', which he considers to exist only in 'traditional' societies, and does not preclude innovation, and in fact justifies it. He also contrasts 'invented tradition' with 'genuine traditions...Where the old ways are alive, traditions need be neither revived or invented' (ibid.: 8) Catalan society counts as the typical post-industrial society which is likely to have seen the breaking and resultant invention of tradition according to Hobsbawm, but in this instance it is difficult to decide decisively how to categorise many of the foods in the gastronomic calendar, be it as 'inventions' or 'old ways'. All the same, it is undoubtedly true that following the gastronomic calendar is a means of expressing Catalan identity, as it provides a connection with a historical (or historicised) past (essential for 'invented traditions'), when the consumption of seasonal foods and the practice of religious feast days was necessary and normalised.

The gastronomic calendar also perpetuates national identity in another way. When consuming dishes on particular days associated with the festive gastronomic calendar, there was an awareness on an individual level that throughout the rest of Catalonia, other Catalans were eating the same dishes. I saw this clearly with one family I knew well, during a Good Friday meal of *Bacallà de Divendres Sant* (cod with boiled eggs, covered with a pancake). This is one of many such meals that could be eaten at this time, which includes Lenten cod, yet makes use of the copious eggs available in spring. One member of the family, Pep, described what this dish, and the gastronomic



calendar, meant to him: ‘There is a connection at the level of all Catalonia, you feel linked to a culture, we’re all doing the same this Good Friday’. By eating the same (or similar) things that one knows others throughout Catalonia were eating, one could feel a connection with other Catalans. Much like the Catalan language, or the collective celebration of national days, following the gastronomic calendar created a connection between the individual and the ‘imagined community’ (see Anderson 1983) of a greater Catalan nation through the shared consumption of the same foods.



Fig. 1: *Bacallà de Divendres Sant*. Photo: Venetia Johannes

### National days, national foods?

Three national holidays are celebrated in Catalonia. One of these holidays, the *Diada de Sant Joan* (Saint John’s Eve, 23<sup>rd</sup> June), had a very strongly associated food, the *Coca de Sant Joan*. A *coca* is a sweetened flat bread, decorated with a variety of toppings. The decoration for the *Coca de Sant Joan* used to be seasonal fresh fruits and nuts, but this has developed into candied fruits and pine nuts, more suited to mass production. The *coca* was one of the most universally recognized and beloved Catalan festival foods among my informants, as a result of its positive associations with street parties, revelry and summer. In recent years it has become a national symbol due to a combination of its positive associations, its position in the gastronomic calendar and its association with a day celebrating pan-Catalan national identity. A major finding of my research has been that foods like *coca* and Pep’s *Bacallà de Divendres Sant* create a culinary ‘imagined community’: Catalans who con-

sume it on this night do so in the knowledge that other Catalans, across Catalonia, are eating the same food. This is similar to findings of Fajans (2012) in Brazil, who discovered that shared foods are instrumental in creating shared cross-national identity, though without the gastronomic calendar aspect.

The two other celebrations, the *Diada de Sant Jordi* (St George's Day, 23<sup>rd</sup> April) and the *Diada* (Catalonia's national day, 11<sup>th</sup> September), were more a focus of clear Catalan sentiment. *Sant Jordi* celebrated Catalonia's patron saint. Over the last century (according to my informants) it became a Catalan Valentine's Day-come-literary celebration, with the exchange of books and roses between lovers. It was a secular festival (I have never seen reference to its religious nature), characterised by street stalls selling books and roses throughout Catalan cities and towns.

It was widely known in my field site that the September *Diada* celebrated the defeat of Catalonia at the conclusion of the Siege of Barcelona in 1714. Catalans were well aware of the irony, but justified it as the start of the strongest period of Catalan repression in their history. This provided the focus for most militant Catalanism, and in recent years it has become part-festive day, part-political protest.

The anthropologist Josep Llobera (2004) contrasts *Sant Jordi* and the *Diada* in his detailed study of Catalan nationalism, *Foundations of National Identity*. He characterises *Sant Jordi* as popular, universalist, non-heroic, profane and focused on leisure, whereas the *Diada* is official, particularist, heroic, sacred and more emotional, celebrating a culture of resistance, love and grievance. This tallies with my experience of the *Diada* as a focus of large-scale, frenetic and very public political protest, compared with the calmer, familial and apolitical atmosphere of *Sant Jordi*.

It is worthwhile briefly discussing here the seasonal nature of Catalanist sentiment and activism. Roseanne Cecil (1997) has noticed a similar phenomenon in Northern Ireland with the marching season. These two festivals are roughly equidistant in the year, and the six months of warmer weather between them see an increase in political Catalanism, reaching its height around the *Diada*. This heightened Catalanist feeling at the end of the summer and early autumn is something that politicians have taken advantage of in recent years, with the unofficial Catalan independence referendum of 2014 on 9<sup>th</sup> November, the regional election in 2015 on 27<sup>th</sup> September, and most recently, the highly contentious independence referendum of 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2017. By the end of November, with the arrival of cooler weather, there is a distinct decline in activist events as Catalans become more family-focused on Christmas and the New Year. This remains the case until *Sant Jordi*, when the season begins again. It is possible that this seasonal nature of political Catalanism may explain the quietening of the pro-independence lobby in 2017, following Madrid's direct takeover of the Catalan government (that, and arrests of key activists and politicians).



As I have already mentioned, these two national holidays did not have an associated food. My informants sometimes recognised this with embarrassment when I brought it up. The writers of a cookbook dedicated to festival foods (Sano and Clotet 2012: 84) admit that in the case of St. George's Day,

*'This day has remained more marked by cultural and patriotic symbols than by gastronomy. The thing that one cannot miss about today is the rose and the book and the street shared with fellow citizens. In contrast, the menu doesn't have any obligatory or complimentary attachment.'*<sup>1</sup>

Despite this, I saw instances of the association between food and *Sant Jordi* in another way, through deliberate efforts to consume Catalan food. For example, a widow I knew in Barcelona described how she used to celebrate the day with her late husband by having lunch at a Catalan restaurant every year. The same also applies to the *Diada*. Food is one of many cultural items that are used to underscore and celebrate a separate Catalan identity on this holiday.



Fig. 2: The image representing September from Omniun Cultural's gastronomy-themed annual calendar from 2013. Note the *senyera* flag, the *pa de pagés* bread, oil and tomatoes to make *pa amb tomàquet*, and the *purró*, a communal drinking vessel, on the left.

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<sup>1</sup> My translation.

In the words of one individual on a Catalanist Facebook group page on the 2012 *Diada*, ‘I was born... where one eats *mongetes amb botifarra* [sausage and beans], *allioli*, snails, *pa amb tomàquet* [bread rubbed with tomato, oil and salt], where one drinks Cava, Vichy Catalan, water from Montseny’,<sup>2</sup> contextualizing the consumption of certain foods as part of being Catalan. At food-related events on the day itself, there was self-conscious consumption of ‘typical’ Catalan foods, and from 2013 onwards there was a food market in the central arena of the pro-independence gathering area in Barcelona. In 2013, Catalonia’s foremost cultural association, Omnium Cultural’s annual calendar, was centred around gastronomy, and for September, the month of the *Diada*, the theme was popular national dish *pa amb tomàquet* and *purro* (a communal drinking vessel) surrounded by the Catalan national flag.

Yet this apparent anomaly has led to attempts to associate these days with a particular food, in line with the other days in the gastronomic calendar, generally a baked good (the Barcelonan Cake-makers’ Guild has been a driving force). However, most Catalans were quite aware of this contradiction, but did not have an entirely positive attitude to these new-fangled attempts at developing new foods for their national holidays, namely the *Pa de Sant Jordi* (Saint George’s Day Bread) and *Pastís de Sant Jordi* (Saint George’s Day Cake) for St. George’s Day and the *Pastís de la Diada* (Diada Cake) for the *Diada*.

The most obvious new food now associated with St. George’s Day was the *Pa de Sant Jordi* (St. George’s bread). This was a comparatively recent invention created in 1988 by a Barcelona baker, Eduardo Crespo. It was a flat savoury bread, containing nuts, cheese, and *sobrassada* (a spicy Mallorcan sausage). The most obvious characteristic was the four red bars of the *senyera* (the Catalan national flag) emblazoned on the bread. The colouring from the *sobrassada* provides the red colour, and the cheese lent a yellow tinge to the alternating yellow bars in the centre (see Figure 3). This bread spread from its original bakery to most Barcelona bakeries, as well as my field site of Vic.

The promotion of *Pa de Sant Jordi* could be found in newspapers and magazines. According to an article for Catalonia’s foremost food magazine, *Cuina* (Cuina.cat 2013),

*‘To each celebration, [there is] food. The Catalan calendar is full of festivities that are celebrated with acts, traditions and something to content the palate and the stomach. St. George’s Day*

2 *Mongetes amb botifarra* are sausage and beans, a popular national dish. *Allioli* is one of the most important sauces in Catalan cuisine. Within Spain, Catalans are popularly identified as consumers of snails and *pa amb tomàquet*, bread rubbed with tomato, oil and salt. The rest are drinks brands. Cava is a sparkling wine from a particular region within Catalonia, and Vichy Catalan and Montseny are bottled water brands.

cannot be an exception... *A roundel decorated with the four bars of the senyera, [pa de Sant Jordi] has become a classic of the festival.* [my emphasis and translation]

The article demonstrates that attaching food to festivals was viewed as a central element in the celebration of a principal feast day in Catalonia. Any possibility that there is now not a food associated with a festive day was denied in order to make the festival into a total sensory experience of national identity.



Fig. 3: *Pans de Sant Jordi* (left) and a *Pastís de Sant Jordi* with a *senyera* (right) in a Barcelona bakery. Similar cakes are made for the *Diada*. Photo: Venetia Johannes

I observed that *Pans de Sant Jordi* were sold in most bakeries, as well as in main thoroughfares alongside the bookstalls set out to commemorate Sant Jordi. This type of food was more a street food, highly portable, resembling the *Coca de Sant Joan* in this respect, as both are festivals that mostly take place in the street. In cake makers and bakeries, alongside the *Pans* and *Pastissos de Sant Jordi*, one could find cakes in the shape of books ('edible books' according to the Barcelona Cake-makers' Guild), or simple cream and sponge cakes popular throughout the year, decorated with *senyeres* for the day.

The origin of these cakes is less clear than the *Pans*, though they were certainly older. That said, there is reference to them in an important work on Catalan cuisine, *L'Art de Menjar a Catalunya* (Vázquez Montalbán 1977), published at the end of the Franco dictatorship, where they are described as 'a rectangular cake, on a thin sponge cake base with butter filling. Topped

with crushed sugar, a glaze, or coco powder, bearing in the middle a stencil of the glorious silhouette of the saint, and red roses' (Vázquez Montalbán 1977: 206).<sup>3</sup> This suggests that these cakes have been around for forty years. Yet they were still to develop a widely recognised connectedness with the day. Most of my informants did not see them as a 'traditional' food, nor spoke of them with the affection reserved for other foods to be found in the gastronomic calendar.

Moving on to the *Diada*, in September, the basic form of the *Pastissos de la Diada* were almost identical to many *Pastissos de Sant Jordi*, although the *senyera* was the main decoration, and there were no references to books or St. George. *Pans de Sant Jordi* were sometimes sold for the *Diada* since the national flag is also the main part of the design. I found that the attempts to develop the *Pastissos de la Diada* for Catalonia's national day met with more friction than the *Pastissos de Sant Jordi*. This may be because large cakes of this type were associated with family gatherings that take place within the home, whereas the *Diada* is a celebration that takes place entirely in the street. This is compounded by the view that the *Pastís de la Diada* was promoted for commercial interests to take advantage of Catalanist sentiment (I discuss my informant's comments in the next section). Many of my informants linked the appearance of these cakes to the rise of the pro-independence movement, whereas before they were much less apparent. Additionally, my informants were largely dismissive of them, a gimmick to take advantage of a contemporary trend. I sometimes caught a sense that there was something immoral, even sacrilegious, in taking advantage of this increased Catalanist sentiment for financial gain, although I did not hear this view expressed outright.

The *Pastís de la Diada* had little significance for the festivities in Barcelona, less than the *Pans* and *Pastissos de Sant Jordi*, and far less than the *Coca de Sant Joan*. Some bakeries remained closed for the annual holiday from August to mid-September. Others made no reference to the *Diada* aside from showing *senyeres* in their windows, and perhaps the calendar from the Barcelona Cake-makers' Guild showing the *Pastís de la Diada*. From my observations, a few adapted their current cakes on offer by placing a *senyera* top. However, there were still a substantial number that sold a variation on the *Pastís de la Diada*. Attitudes in the bakeries themselves were mixed: some I spoke with were proud to contain Catalanist products, while others considered it 'something fun', not an expression of die-hard Catalanism. In the 2014 *Diada*, I noticed that *Pastissos de la Diada* were more prevalent in areas around the central festivities and the protest march. The first recorded instance of a *Pastís de la Diada* was on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1977, when a group of members of the Barcelona Cakemaker's Guild presented a cake decorated with a *senyera* to Josep Tarradellas, President in exile of the Generalitat (Cuina.cat 2015). One Barcelona baker recalled them from his childhood

3 My translation.



forty years ago. Still, his comments and their origin, may support another assertion I heard from my informants, namely that these cakes were from Barcelona. This is significant because Barcelona was perceived to be a place with a less concentrated Catalan identity, one that does not support independence, and a source of new inventions as opposed to older 'traditions'. It is interesting to point out that the baker I spoke with had begun to present cakes with the pro-independence flag, in line with the demands of an increasingly pro-independence market. This backs up some of the assertions in my previous paragraph about the commodification of pro-independence sentiment, as savvy business owners take advantage of cultural and political movements.



Fig. 4: A bakery and cake makers shop in Barcelona for the *Diada* in 2013, showing the national flag (*senyera*) and examples of *Pastissos de la Diada*. Note the image from the calendar of the Cake-makers Guild in the top right. Photo: Venetia Johannes

### Reactions to the invention of national foods

I would now like to discuss the reactions to these foods together, to reveal subtle differences in attitude. The most obvious visual feature of all of these new foods has been the presence of the Catalan national flag, the *senyera*, along with the pro-independence flag, the *estellada* (a *senyera* overlaid with a blue or red pennant and white star), suggesting obvious nationalist associations. When I first noted the presence of these foods, I expected that they would be held in great affection by Catalans, as the flags are revered as one of Catalonia's foremost patriotic symbols. A testament to the growing support for pro-independence Catalanism in my field site was the increasingly frequent appearance of the *senyera* and the *estellada* in the public sphere,



hanging from town halls, balconies and windows, painted on walls, or placed in shop windows. However, I found that foods emblazoned with the national flag received a mixed response.

For instance, Berta, a language teacher in her thirties, called the newly developed foods ‘very consumerist’ and ‘a recent invention’. When asked if she liked the *Pastissos de la Diada*, she said, ‘I really like everything around the *Diada*, but this is an exaggeration. I wouldn’t buy it. It’s a business thing’. Irene, an informant in her twenties, remarked: ‘I’ve seen that thing with the four bars for a few years [*Pans de Sant Jordi*], but it’s not very well known’. In another conversation with her and her family, they agreed ‘this is new... something that the cake-makers do to make money now. It’s all marketing, invented. Cake-makers and bakers want to sell, so they do this. It’s not traditional’.

I received an almost identical reaction from a group interview with Catalan activists (part of the *Assemblea cultural* group). These were all older than Berta and Irene, but their attitudes were notably similar. One remarked, ‘You might want to eat a cake like this one day, but it has no tradition at all’, and others contrasted it with better-established foods in the gastronomic calendar, such as Lent *bunyols*. Another participant, Joan, a retiree who organised popular culture events, said dismissively that these foods were ‘invented...an attempt to add a cake to the festival because it didn’t have one’.

Another activist, Marta (late fifties) also made a comparison with the Easter *mona* (which she characterised as ‘traditional’) with *Pastís de la Diada*, which she claimed was ‘total marketing’ and ‘invented’. This is ironic considering the *mona*’s history, since the chocolate egg *mones*, to which she was referring, only came into widespread popularity in the 1930s and superseded a much older version of the *mona*. Eighty years on, this style of *mona* has now been naturalised as ‘traditional’ (although a fashionable Barcelona bakery has now started to recreate the old-style *mona*, with eggs baked into the dough). It should be clear that this contrast with ‘traditional’ and ‘invented’ was regularly used when discussing these new national foods. Although my informants were unaware of Hobsbawm’s (1983) ‘invented traditions’, these new foods, and the *mona*, are perhaps the best examples of culinary invented traditions under discussion in this article.

They perfectly match Hobsbawm’s description of inventing traditions as ‘a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition’ (Hobsbawm 1983: 4). These foods are coalescing around particular forms (formalisation), consumed on certain days in the year and in certain contexts (ritualisation), and placed in a context of the gastronomic calendar, which itself exists by the imposition of repetition. The historic past also need not be lengthy, as in the case of the *mona*. However, the *Sant Jordi* and *Diada* foods have still to ‘establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition’ (ibid.: 2).

Despite these views, the fact that these foods continued to be sold suggests that there was a market for these products. When I hunted round Barcelona's bakeries at the end of the *Diada* in 2013 and 2014, I found that most had been sold already. Likewise, there were very few of the *Pastissos* and *Pans de Sant Jordi* left in bakeries on 24<sup>th</sup> April. I had a good example of the context in which these cakes are likely to be eaten from a young Barcelonan, Eloi (early to mid-twenties), who admitted that, like most informants, he was fond of the *Pastissos de la Diada* because of the appearance of the *senyeres* ('it makes me really happy, all the *senyeres*, it's nice'). However, he did not see these foods as signifiers of his national identity through food. His father, on the other hand, disliked *Pastissos de la Diada* since he considered them too new and untraditional (my informant took care to point out that his father is very pro-independence and took upholding Catalan traditions very seriously). However, his mother will always try and buy a *Pastís de la Diada* as a nod to the national day, which his father will grudgingly eat.

This final informant's experience shows a difference between the experience in Barcelona and that of my field site of Vic. Several of my local informants associated these new 'inventions' with Barcelona, in line with the prevailing view of the capital as consumerist, cosmopolitan and the point of origin of new trends. Similarly, when I showed a *Pa de Sant Jordi* I had brought from Barcelona to informants in my field site, they saw it as something from Barcelona, even though it was sold locally. Once again, they saw the *Pans* as a good moneymaking scheme for bakers, and therefore more a symbol of the perceived over-commercialization of festivals than strongly representative of gastronomic identity.

Nonetheless, as with my Barcelonan informant Eloi, the reaction of my local informants was not entirely negative. As I suggested earlier, the obvious presence of the *senyera*, a national symbol of deep emotional resonance, means that my informants found it difficult to dismiss these foods entirely, as it would suggest a dismissal of the national flag. As I have also already suggested, despite their mixed reception, their continued presence year after year suggests that bakeries made money from them.

While there is proof that some of these foods have been in Catalonia for a generation or more, it seemed that they have not yet entered popular consciousness as a 'tradition', possibly because some of the population could remember a time without them. It was interesting that these attitudes were present amongst all age groups. Even younger Catalans who had grown up with them are possibly influenced by elders who viewed them as something new. It is not '*de tota la vida*' ('from all of one's life'), a common marker of something legitimated by tradition. However, the increased Catalan awareness of recent years has developed a demand for Catalanist products and memorabilia, and these foods could be seen as an answer to that demand. While they might once have been a side point to the national holidays, the

days themselves have also taken on greater significance as a focus of Catalan identity expression. Therefore items associated with these days have likewise come under much greater scrutiny, hence their apparent ‘newness’, as bakeries and cake-makers have seen an opportunity to promote them following the rise of pro-independence Catalanism. At the time of writing, the *Pans* and *Pastissos de Sant Jordi*, and the *Pastissos de la Diada* continue to be bought. There is nothing to suggest they will disappear in the future.

Two informants also made the point that there was one circumstance in which they would come to accept a *Pastís de la Diada*, and that was with the arrival of independence. Both informants were interviewed in separate contexts, but both were strongly pro-independence. One of the Assemblea group remarked in passing: ‘Once we are independent, then we’ll have to have a cake to celebrate’. Another activist, Marta, added, ‘Of course, the day we proclaim independence, we will have to do an independence day cake’, but not yet. The cake would therefore be acceptable if it were to celebrate a momentous event, since an appropriate foodstuff would be required for the proper celebration of an independence day. It will be interesting to see modulations in these views following the events of October 2017, especially the abortive declaration of independence on 27<sup>th</sup> October.

The power of the flag as a symbol of national identity is undeniable, and when emblazoned on foods, it gave them a certain appeal. Just as Catalan foodstuffs packaged for export or tourism include a *senyera* to show their origin and highlight their role as Catalanist symbols (or vicariously represent the nation), so these *Pastissos de la Diada/de Sant Jordi* and *Pans de Sant Jordi* are connected to Catalan identity in a less subtle manner. Even when informants criticised these foods for being new and not ‘traditional’, others still admitted a grudging liking for the presence of the national flag.

### ‘Fent la botifarra al Dia de la Hispanitat’: Catalonia’s anti-festival and sausages

One can see that Catalonia’s three principal national holidays (*Sant Jordi*, *Sant Joan* and the *Diada*) are clear celebrations of Catalan identity. However, there is another extraordinary holiday that deserves attention, which Catalans ‘celebrated’, but in such a way as to undermine its nature as a festive holiday. This is Spain’s National Day, the *Dia de la Hispanitat*, on 12<sup>th</sup> October, which celebrated the anniversary of Christopher Columbus’s arrival in the Americas. Since this day celebrated Spanish identity, among Catalanists this has been transformed into a day on which anti-Spanish sentiment is focused.

One of the most visible ways that Catalanists marked this cross-national Spanish event is by insisting on working during that day. In 2012, both the Assemblea and Omnim Cultural (civil-society cultural organizations) made announcements that their offices would remain open, just as on normal

weekdays, to show the irrelevance of Spanish festivals to Catalonia. Around Vic, shops were open as usual for the morning, and most remained open for the afternoon too. Many of the shop windows remained decked out in the Catalan flags and displays of the *Diada* from the month before.

Despite the refusal to recognise the day as a holiday, the day has been marked throughout Catalonia by pro-Catalan events, generally of a political and pro-independence nature. And like the other national days, food as an identifiable symbol of Catalan identity was brought into play. As of 2012, 12<sup>th</sup> October had become the day of the *botifarrada*, or *botiflerada*, one of Catalonia's many '-ades' (dining events focused on one particular food), designated here for the communal eating of sausages.

The consumption and association of sausages with this day is heavy with significance. Aside from their privileged position as a food particularly associated with Catalonia, to *fer la botifarra* is a gesture with vulgar and insulting connotations throughout the Mediterranean. It involves placing the left hand on the crook of the elbow, and then bending it up, so that the forearm and fist stand vertically. The Catalan name for this is the *botitfarra de pagès* ('peasant sausage', due to its obvious resemblance), but the name can also be applied to certain varieties of sausage. Yet by its name, the *botifarra de pagès* is not just a confrontation, it is also profoundly associated with the countryside, the *casa de pagès* (peasant house) and the food produced there, which produces powerful images in Catalan national identity discourse (though it is hardly unique to Catalonia – see Gellner 1983; Smith 1988; Yotova 2014). On the *Diada* in 2012, on one of the most prominent thoroughfares of the afternoon protest march was a huge sign of a sausage with the words '*A Catalunya, fem botifarra*' (literally 'in Catalonia, we make sausage'). This was a clever play on words, meaning both to make the gesture and to make sausages. Such a simple phrase and visual cue not only represented the mobilisation of a cultural fact and a shared symbol, it was also a blatant insult to opponents of Catalan nationhood.

Returning to the *Dia de la Hispanitat*, it should be clear that eating this food on Spain's National Day and publicising the fact became a means of expressing Catalan identity on a day when Spanish identity should have been celebrated. A '*Botiflerada*' I attended in 2012, organised by Omnim Cultural, was a typical type of event. The day began with a talk on the future of Catalonia as a state, followed by lunch consisting of *mongetes del ganxet amb botifarra* (a type of haricot beans, and sausage). Both these foods are products particular to Catalonia, and the *mongetes del ganxet* has European Protected Denomination of Origin status. In this context, the emphasis on the local nature of the foodstuffs placed in a Catalanist festival shows well how such foodstuffs act as bearers of national identity. They were also called *productes de la terra* ('products of the land'). This was again a popular phrase in Catalonia in these contexts that emphasises the connection between foods,

land and, by extension, the nation. At the event itself, participants and organizers referred to this meal as ‘a folkloric act’, ‘a Catalan dish’ and ‘a poor dish’. In the latter case, this referred not to its meagreness, but to the way pork products, like sausages, are used to conserve meat and thriftily use all parts of the pig – a classic example of the application of national behavioural ideals to food. Participants also discussed and idealised the rural context of this kind of food, once more emphasising *botifarra* as something that is *de pagès* (of the peasant).

### The market as national space

I would like to discuss here a different kind of festive event, that of food markets. The market space in Catalonia has acted as a nexus for past and present identities, and a centre of social interaction, through its role as a source of food (Congdon 2015). While foods that are not in season or from the local area can now be bought in markets, these locales have been viewed as the ideal location to see seasonality in action through purchasing Catalan-specific produce and varieties, and interacting with local growers. These markets were also seen as a holdover of the weekly markets held in towns and villages in the past.

These markets have also inspired a newer type of market (that is, developed since the 1970s), a gastronomic market that occurs as part of a food fair, or festival. Today, most such markets have been based around a single food product, particular to the region and the season. Examples include mushroom or pig-based produce fairs in the autumn and winter months, chestnut fairs for All Saints, citrus fairs (mainly in the south of Catalonia) for December, olive-oil picking and pressing from October to March, and over the spring and summer months fairs celebrating a wide variety of seasonal fruits and vegetables (favourites include strawberries, cherries, honey and herbs). Other festivals celebrated specific varieties of products associated with an area, such as the February *calçotada* (eating spring onions with a spicy sauce) in the city of Valls (the capital of the region where this dish originated). I was unable to collect accurate figures on the number of such food festivals throughout Catalonia, though certainly there were well over five hundred during fieldwork. Some have lasted for over three decades, whilst others have proved more ephemeral, not lasting beyond the third or fourth year. Simultaneously, local restaurateurs sometimes co-operated with festival organisers to run *jornades gastronòmiques* (gastronomic open days) alongside these events, providing menus and dishes inspired by the festival.

Most of today’s gastronomic fairs and similar events dated from after the end of the Franco period (post 1977). However, their origin can be traced to an event that occurred in 1975, while Franco was still alive, called the ‘Catalan Gastronomic Assortment’. The aim of the event was to give prominence



to Catalan cuisine, which was difficult to find in restaurants at that time. The day itself was a moment not just to promote Catalan cuisine, but one when other aspects of Catalan culture could be presented and celebrated, albeit in a controlled sense. The event was a classic example of how a seemingly innocuous demonstration of Catalan culture (in this case cuisine) was monopolised to provide a form of covert resistance, which included *sardana* dancing (the Catalan national dance), traditional music and a *senyera* in flowers on the stage at the front of the event. While the regime allowed such 'folkloric' demonstrations, for the organizers and participants this was a covert way of flouting the regime and expressing a forbidden identity. A festival celebrating food was the instrument through which this could be done.

In the 1980s, there was an explosion of Catalan cultural events. Somewhat inspired by the 1975 event, in 1981 the *Generalitat's* Department of Tourism developed a year-long, Catalan-wide *Congrés Català de la Cuina* (Catalan Cuisine Convention), which took place in different parts of Catalonia. These concerted events acted as the inspiration and foundation for the food-centred festivals that developed in the years afterwards. Some annual events were even established during the Convention, such as the *Valls Calçotada* I mentioned earlier and wine-related festivals in the Penedès and Garraf Cava regions. As a result, the background and origin of these food fairs and markets was clearly motivated by expressions of Catalan identity, which developed during the post-Franco period.

Municipalities also have taken advantage of markets' touristic potential. Due to its busy schedule of markets and fairs throughout the year, my field-work site of Vic was sometimes called the 'City of Markets', a name promoted by the city itself. Historically, the city's physical location was important for the development of markets, halfway between the Pyrenees and Barcelona. There are two weekly markets in Vic, on Tuesdays and Saturdays. Other markets also continue to be held throughout the year. The most important is undoubtedly the *Mercat de Rams* (Palm Market) held during the weekend of Palm Sunday, and the *Mercat Medieval* (Medieval Market) in December. The former is a livestock fair, which also includes an extensive food market, and a market to sell Easter palm leaves ('Rams') after which the market is named. This fair has been referred to by name since the mid-nineteenth century, but there have been similar annual fairs in Vic since 1316 (Ponce and Ramisa 2006).

The *Mercat Medieval* in December, on the other hand, came into existence only in 1995 as part of the post-Franco festival renaissance. The intention was to 're-create' the medieval Christmas fairs recorded in Vic in the Middle Ages, or what Boissevain (1992) has termed a 'resumption', or a 'resurrected' festival (the *Mercat de Rams* bears some resemblance to a 'revitalized' festival). The market I experienced included costumed stallholders (to anyone familiar with Columbian exchange, the sight of chain-smoking,

chocolate-eating medieval peasants is somewhat surreal), medieval-themed meals and an enclosure that sought to recreate an authentic medieval market (even down to medieval coinage). My informants saw it as a descendent of past markets, despite its relatively recent inception, suggesting some characteristics of Hobsbawm's 'invention of tradition' (1983), but without the ritualised or formalised structures. The *Mercat Medieval* in particular shows how the market is used as a space of connectedness with the past. Both fairs were popular with tourists from other parts of Catalonia as spaces where they can interact with other Catalans in a festive and convivial atmosphere.

Moreover, it is important to emphasise that Catalan markets are spaces of commensality. Both fairs demonstrate well that, even in festivals where food is not the main subject, food and its consumption play key roles. A feature shared by the *Mercat Medieval* and the *Mercat del Ram* was the sheer number of food-related stalls, which took over a large part of the old quarter of Vic and accounted for about three quarters of the stalls present. In both markets it also became clear that a central part of the experience is buying and eating street food in the company of other attendees, as is drinking from *purrons* (communal drinking vessels that do not touch the lips) left in various parts of the market. Eating and drinking in the street was therefore a central experience of the social participation of these markets.

Another centre of commensality at many annual food fairs I visited was the dining area. Most food fairs and festival organizers provided a meal, often one that allowed visitors to taste the product that is the subject of the event. The food provided always included a large slab of *pa de pagès* (peasant bread), with a tomato to rub into the bread to make *pa amb tomàquet*. Unless the meal is the focus of the event itself (for example, the *calçotada*, or spring-onion eating), popular dishes at such events generally revolved around popular 'traditional' Catalan staples: *botifarra amb mongetes* (sausage and beans), a selection of barbecued meats and sausages, *escudella i carn d'olla* (a meat stew), or rice- and pasta-based meals.

These meals took place at long dining tables and benches that could hold large groups. Such meals were originally associated with *Festa Major*, the annual feast day particular to each town and village, which has also contributed to the more recently developed festivals. The *Festa Major* was idealized as another manifestation of the past (many do in fact have their origins on patron saints' days), and the continued celebration of these events was seen as an expression of past identities. While the religious element of many of these events has been toned down, the presence of Catalan symbols, such as the *senyera* and/or *estellada*, *sardana* and the *gegants* (large wooden figures), were common. Yet the most prominent feature of such events was usually food, so much so that there has been a class of dishes sometimes called the 'Dishes of the *Festa Major*' (these include more elaborate version of dishes I listed in the last paragraph). Several informants emphasised how important

the *Festa Major* was in the development of Catalan cuisine. While many of these dishes were no longer cooked at *Festa Majors* for reasons of cost and time, communal eating remained a strong part of the festive experience.

In closing, I should add that my informants rarely visited fairs alone, but often as part of a group of family or friends, and chose to visit a particular market because of the social ties in that locale. The long tables were highly conducive to commensality, since they required different groups of people to sit together and interact. From my experience, conversation with strangers came easily once seated at the long tables crowded with diners, *purrons* and food. I also noticed how these forms of communal dining were very present at pro-independence and political gatherings, such as those on the *Diada* in September and *Festa de la Hispanitat* in October. This is another example of how a ‘traditional’ method of commensality and conversation, associated with Catalan festive events like the *Festa Major*, has been formalized (Hobsbawm 1983) into more politicised expressions of national identity, such as at the *Diada*.



Fig. 5: A view of the festive meal organised by Omniium Cultural for *Diada* in 2012. Many political and cultural organisations arrange their own dinner in Barcelona on this day. Note the long tables and crowded, convivial atmosphere. Photo: Venetia Johannes

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented a strongly ethnographic overview of the way in which festive and gastronomic events throughout the year provide an opportunity to express Catalan national identity. The concept of Hobsbawm's

'invention of tradition' has been discussed throughout this article, in particular the importance of a connectedness with a historic past (real or imagined). Yet it has sometimes been unclear at what point certain elements of Catalan culinary culture (in particular the gastronomic calendar) are truly 'invented traditions', as 'the peculiarity of "invented" traditions is that the continuity with [the past] is largely factitious' (Hobsbawm 1983: 2). Food markets, on the other hand, are closer to Hobsbawm's definition of invented traditions as something that establishes continuity with the past. Central to their success is their ability to tap into the emotional connections many Catalans have with a recreation of the past (or at least, an attempt to do so), solidifying an image of permanence in Catalan culinary culture. Yet in both these instances, while some claims to past continuity are fictitious and imagined, one should not dismiss any continuity with the past entirely.

Perhaps the best examples of invented traditions so far discussed are the creation of new foods associated with *Sant Jordi* and the *Diada*, which provide an example of a potential 'tradition' in the process of being legitimised. What is interesting is that my informants were aware that this process was taking place for recently 'invented' foods. However, they discounted the possibility that many of the 'traditional' foods had also at one time been 'invented', or that their contemporary form rarely resembled a 'past' form (for instance, the *mona*, which is perhaps the best example of an 'invented [culinary] tradition'). Even more recent additions to the gastronomic calendar, such as the *botifarrada* on the *Dia de la Hispanitat*, are couched in terms of 'tradition' and rurality. Perhaps in several decades, another anthropologist will come to Catalonia and find their informants describing *Pans de Sant Jordi* and *Pastissos de la Diada* as a 'traditional food'.

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